



Navajo Nation Council – Office of the Speaker

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NEWS RELEASE:

Resources and Development Committee hears report on grazing permits, vegetative studies

SAINT MICHAELS, Ariz. – The Resources and Development Committee of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council convened for a regular meeting on June 5, at the Karigan Professional Business Complex. The meeting, which ran just over three hours, adjourned at approximately 2:00 p.m.

The committee received a report from the natural resources arm of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) regarding grazing permits and results of vegetation studies conducted within the Fort Defiance agency last year.

In his report, Calvert Curley, acting BIA natural resources manager for the Fort Defiance agency, provided the committee with statistics from a study completed in District 18 citing the current number of sheep units versus the recommended sheep unit capacity of the land. District 18 encompasses areas surrounding the Fort Defiance, Red Lake, and Sawmill chapters.

Curley explained that in some areas current sheep units were more than double – and in some cases, triple – the recommended capacity of sheep units for those designated areas.

“This is a good presentation that should be shared with the public,” Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) commented.

Expressing equal sensitivities toward grazing permit holders, their livestock, and their impact on the land, Council Delegate Benally was particularly concerned with how to address the situation without harm to the people and their livelihood. She was adamant that grazing permit holders be included in the dialogue.

Vegetation transect studies indicate that native plants in the district are drastically declining as one transect plot in District 18 showed that out of six native plants that should normally exist there, only one – the sand dropseed – was present. Even then, it existed in small amount.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Cornfields, Ganado, Jeddito, Kin Dah Lichii, Steamboat) called upon his council counterparts, as well as the involved governmental entities, to work more collaboratively and collectively toward a solution.

Imperative to the discussion would be representatives from the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, the Navajo Land Department, Navajo grazing officials, the BIA Branch of Natural Resources,

the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), any Navajo departmental entities dealing with water quality and resources, individual grazing permit holders, the general public, and “anyone else who has a stake or responsibility in this issue,” according to the committee.

“I recommend that we come together to seriously talk about this. I’d really hate to see our land diminish further,” said Council Delegate Shepherd, referring to the declining native plant numbers and the increase of mobile sand dunes that result from less vegetation stabilizing the soil.

Council Delegate Leonard H. Pete (Chinle) acknowledged that discussions involving grazing on the Navajo Nation can be quite sensitive and he also declared to committee members, “The Navajo Nation is going to turn into a desert – we need to take action.”

Holding the future of the nation in mind, Council Delegate Pete continued on to ask the committee and the public in attendance, “We need to ask ourselves, ‘What do we have for our future generations?’ Are they going to live in a desert?”

The committee issued a directive for all the aforementioned stakeholders to meet on the grazing permit and land impact issue, but most importantly to work together in producing a plan that will benefit all involved parties.

The meeting date has been scheduled for June 28 and 29 – and June 30, if additional time is required. The meeting location has not yet been set, but information will be forthcoming.

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